

Erie County Human Relations Commission

Minutes – September 26, 2016

Attendance

Commissioners: George Morgan, Bob Howden, Jim Wandless, Luisa Heifner, Willie McAdory and Amy Danzer

Staff: Joe Aguglia and Charlotte Scalise

Meeting was called to order at 6:12 pm

Approval of Minutes

Bob Howden made a motion to approve the minutes of July. This was seconded by Jim Wandless. They were approved unanimously. The meeting in August had no quorum but notes are available.

Directors Report

Tracy Leet has been appointed to the commission by Ed DiMattio. She could not come tonight.

New Business

We will be receiving \$5,000 from the state Act 137 to fund more housing testing prior to June 30. Although Joe Berdis from the Erie County Planning Department suggested that tests be done in McKean and Girard because they receive federal funding, there were concerns among commission members that the number of rental units is too small to allow for testing to take place and would only continue to frustrate the testers and delay the testing. Testing may be more successful in Union City and Corry. It was suggested that since other testing has been done but not released, this testing be done as early as possible so that the results may be combined with those of earlier testing and be released early in 2017.

It was noted that County Council is interested in modifying the Human Relations ordinance. Given the “assignment” of Caitlyn Strohmeier, intern to County Council and long-time advocate for transgender people having their own category of protected class and not under sexual orientation, to “assist” the Human Relations Commission, Joe Aguglia is hoping to suggest revisions to the ordinance in light of current best practices. These include adding transgender, criminal history and source of income discrimination provisions. It was noted that the state has included genetic information as well. When Joe is done drafting revisions, these will be shared with the HRC for input and further revision. Kyle Foust suggested that, since Council plans to review and revise the ordinance, each Commissioner should contact the person who appointed her/him to express how they feel about the office location and process for hiring staff members. Hopefully the dialogue between the Commissioners and Council will be productive and make the HRC ordinance revision smooth and better protect our citizens from discrimination.

It was noted that the County’s ADA roundtable has not met since the organization of the meetings moved from the Human Services office to the Erie County Office of Human Resources in January.

Amy Danzer and Willie McAdory spoke at the County Council Finance Committee meeting on September 15. Both expressed the desire to keep the HRC offices out of the courthouse given the discrimination those who are filing complaints may already feel. It was also expressed that having the offices within the courthouse would prevent county employees from feeling they could file a complaint.

Old Business

The first of the TV commercials on housing discrimination is currently airing. There is a hope to create another commercial not with the tag of Blatant & Subtle like the current one but something like "Fair Housing is Affordable, Accessible and Safe." Please send Charlotte Scalise any suggestions.

Charlotte has received phone calls from those who have seen the commercials. One includes Edinboro landlords who are concerned about the requirements being put on them by the borough.

We received little traffic or benefit from having participated in Celebrate Erie the last few years. Unless our location is moved, there was general consensus that we should not participate next year.

The subcommittee for hiring the investigator met and whittled the blinded (only the qualifications of the individuals were reviewed with all personal information blacked out) resumes (40) to the top five choices. Two had the highest rankings and the other three were close. Interviews are being set up with these individuals and the committee. The committee still does not know the names of the individuals they will be interviewing to prevent any perception of bias.

Charlotte attended the Apartment Association dinner. They did not receive her message of considering the inclusion of those with criminal histories under the ordinance well.

Public Comment or Open Discussion

Charlotte informed the group that more buildings in the Grenada complex were going to be condemned and more people displaced. There are many minorities and those with disabilities who live there who will need to find other housing.

Adjournment

Jim Wandless moved that the meeting be adjourned. It was seconded by Louisa Heifner and approved unanimously.

Meeting ended at 7:35 pm.